

GENERATIONS OF LOVE

Humanae vitae
(1968-2018)



What is Natural Family Planning?

Natural Family Planning (NFP) is an umbrella term for certain methods used to achieve and avoid pregnancies. These methods are based on observation of the naturally occurring signs and symptoms of the fertile and infertile phases of a woman's menstrual cycle. When couples understand NFP methods and are motivated to follow them, NFP is up to 99 percent successful in spacing or limiting births. These methods are not the old methods of the 1940s and 1950s.

Natural Family Planning reflects the dignity of the human person within the context of marriage and family life, promotes openness to life, and recognizes the value of the child. The best way to learn NFP is from a qualified instructor, who is certified through a NFP teacher-training program.

The Diocese of Sacramento requires all couples preparing for the Sacrament of Marriage to receive an introduction to Natural Family Planning. It is to be a one-hour minimum overview of how NFP works and it must be provided by persons with specific training and expertise in NFP. Divine Savior recommends the following instructors from our area. Please contact them to set up the appointment for the introductory session.

Katie Smith
916-521-1805
katie.smith@hush.com
Creighton Method
English
(Roseville)

Colin & Meghan Bardin
916-519-6802
megbardin@gmail.com
Sympto-Thermal
Method
English
(Sacramento)

Veronica Pintor
916-733-6256
veronica.pintor@dignityhealth.org
Creighton Method
Spanish & English
(Sacramento)

The following explanation was prepared by Alice B. Heinzen, Director of the Office for Marriage and Family Life for the Diocese of LaCrosse, Wisconsin, which has a similar diocesan NFP requirement.

Really? Are You Serious?

These are common words to my ears. I hear them over and over again from the engaged couples that call our NFP (Natural Family Planning) Office when they are required to register for NFP instruction. These couples cannot believe that in an age of free contraception for all, the Catholic Church would still ask them to learn about a family planning method that they think is ineffective and unreliable.

Each time that I hear those words, I have to smile to myself because I uttered those same words years ago when I was asked to take a full course of instruction myself. My reaction was one of disbelief spiced with a generous dose of resentment. In my case, I was asked to consider NFP after the birth of our third child. He was a healthy, LARGE baby, and my pregnancy, labor and delivery had been grueling. I was not open to another baby so when I was presented with the idea of NFP I am quite positive I said, “Really? Are you serious?”

The person asking me to consider this option was my husband. To make a long story short, he was way ahead of me in understanding that our intimate relations would be much more fulfilling if we didn’t use contraception. He understood that the two dynamics of intercourse (love giving and life giving) should always be connected. He knew that if our marriage partnership was going to flourish and deepen, we had to figure this family planning thing out. We had to submit to God’s plan for sexual expression and not rely on contraception. (I think he was having regular conversations with the Holy Spirit.)

It is very safe to say that I was not good at being a submissive wife – especially in the arena of family planning. But, I told my husband that I would attend the first NFP class. In my mind, one class would be all that it would take for him to see the foolishness of his idea. And so we went: he with a joyful heart and me with a chip on both shoulders.

I am sure that my outward demeanor told the story of resentment that existed in my heart. Nonetheless, the teaching couple greeted us warmly and began unfolding the scientific research behind NFP. Men are fertile all the time. Women are fertile some of the time – to be precise about six days out of every menstrual cycle. The female body gives off signals that can be reliably observed when it is entering the fertile time and stops those signals when the fertile time ends. When a woman knows her signs and charts them, she and her husband can divide any menstrual cycle into three parts; before the fertile window, the fertile window, and after the fertile window. With this knowledge, they will know the best time to achieve a pregnancy and the time to abstain if they want to avoid a pregnancy.

To my surprise, this made sense, especially because my course of study in college included a heavy emphasis on anatomy and physiology and women’s health. In my classes, I had learned all about the male and female

reproductive systems. But, no one ever told me about a partnership of fertility exists between the two sexes. I never learned that a man is constantly fertile or that the woman could reliably predict her fertile window. No one had ever told me that there is such a thing as “couple” fertility (the combination of the two and how they can overlap with probable outcomes). Nope. My major studies missed this crucial information. And in doing so, they withheld something that I had a right to know. They withheld necessary facts that led me to believe I had to always be protected when I engaged in intercourse. They led me to believe that my body was somehow imperfect in its design and that I had to take synthetic hormones in order to be “healthy”.

The more the NFP instructors shared, the more my thinking changed. I began to question my feminist thinking that when it came to sex, it was only about my body and my wants. Slowly, my resentment was shifting away from NFP and towards those who had suppressed vital information during my days in college.

As I sat in that first NFP class with the scales falling from my eyes, I began to see what my husband wanted me to see. God had designed women and men in such a way that they had a shared responsibility to fertility and new life. A woman’s changing fertility is not imperfect, nor a burden. It is a gift. My fertility was a gift to me. It was a part of who I am. My husband already appreciated and honored me and my fertility. All he wanted me to do was join him in the appreciation and honor of this innately beautiful aspect of my being.

Really? Are you serious? These words suddenly had a totally different meaning in my heart.

That is why I always smile when I hear these words spoken by couples like you who are starting their journey with Christ in the Sacrament of Marriage. Like me, you have some valuable education to learn about family planning and the ideal that God has set for you.

May God grant you open hearts as you learn about NFP.

For more information about NFP, please see the website for the Diocese of Sacramento:

<https://www.scd.org/family-and-faith-formation/common-questions-about-natural-family-planning>